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Latin American Trends

STAFF NOTES

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Chile: Backsliding on Human Rights

Growing evidence that Chilean security forces are responsible for recent disappearances of individuals who run afoul of the military government threatens to refuel the human rights controversy.

The government's much publicized decrees providing safeguards for political prisoners and reforming internal security practices are apparently being circumvented by intelligence organizations. The number of detentions reported under the state of siege has declined and charges of torture have diminished, but unexplained disappearances appear to be occurring with more frequency.

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One of the most potentially embarrassing cases concerns the disappearance last month of two wealthy Jewish brothers. [REDACTED] the brothers are confined in a colony run by former German Nazis who enjoy the protection of the Chilean government. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] they are in the custody of Chile's national intelligence service, which reports only to President Pinochet. Both the President and his justice minister have emphatically denied having any knowledge of the brothers' whereabouts.

The mysterious death of a Chilean leftist who had been working for the UN in Santiago could draw bad publicity. When he was found dead in mid-July the government dismissed the death as accidental, but there are indications that he was tortured and killed by intelligence operatives who then staged an "accident."

Considerable publicity has already been given the expulsion over a week ago of two leading lawyers, one of whom had [REDACTED] taken on the case of the UN employee's death. The two were hustled out of the

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country on a flight to Argentina in contravention of decrees requiring warrants, identification of the arresting authority, and prompt notification of relatives. The lawyers, one of whom is an important Christian Democratic Party spokesman, also incurred the government's hostility in June when they signed a letter to the OAS foreign ministers meeting in Santiago complaining of human rights violations.

[REDACTED] President Pinochet as saying that he will no longer tolerate any break in the political recess. Pinochet is ready to crack down on other high-ranking politicians and church members if they get out of line, and he allegedly singled out former president Eduardo Frei in this context. The recent decision to expel two important political figures was probably intended as a warning that criticism of the government will be more harshly repressed.

Frei recently [REDACTED] was outraged over the summary deportation and that it was clear the government has adopted a policy of open harassment of Christian Democrats and other moderate opposition groups. Frei recounted a succession of incidents against party leaders which smack of official intimidation. He said that Christian Democratic and Social Democratic forces in Europe would try to get the matter before the UN and the OAS. Widespread publicity about this incident will feed anti-Chilean sentiment abroad.

Critics of Chilean security practices have had little new material to work with in recent months, and the convening of the OAS foreign ministers in Santiago gave the government a degree of respectability it had long been seeking. The modest reforms which made this possible are clearly breaking down.

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